

Marlborough limestone wheat grass

Australopyrum calcis ssp calcis

Marlborough limestone wheat grass is one of five threatened grassy plants included in a national recovery plan. They all grow in dry fertile sites in the eastern South Island. These places may be used for farming, quarrying or recreation and are also often of significance to Māori. Hopefully with collaboration between all those involved it will be possible to find compatible ways of managing these places. A first step towards this is helping people recognise the plants.

About Marlborough limestone wheat grass

Description:

A tufted perennial grass with simple unbranched head.

Leaf 6–25cm long, 0.5–3.5mm wide, flat, green to blue-green; upper surface with small teeth on veins; lower surface with conspicuous white midrib and two white side ribs. Flowering stem to 60cm tall with dark swollen nodes.

Developing spikelets more or less parallel to stem but at right angles during flowering. Awns (hair tips) short. As they ripen spikelets turn stiff and straw-coloured.



Photo: Shannel Courtney



Photo: Allan Herbarium,
Landcare Research



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Distinguishing features:

Spikelets at right angles to stem when mature. Leaves with small teeth on veins. Stem toothed within seedhead, otherwise smooth. Canterbury subspecies has hairs on stem.

Similar plants:

Canterbury limestone wheat grass (*Australopyrum calcis* subspecies *optatum*), *Elymus* species, sweet vernal (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), other grasses.

Distribution:

Leatham Valley, South Marlborough

National Threat Status:

Nationally endangered

Habitat:

High fertility soil at base of limestone outcrops. In light shade under trees and shrubs.

Threats:

Competition with exotic grasses and other weeds.



Photo: Shannel Courtney



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